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UNCLAS RANGOON 001277

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON RECENT ARRESTS IN RANGOON

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: THIRTY PEOPLE, INCLUDING SEVERAL RELATIVELY WELL-KNOWN POLITICAL ACTIVISTS AND AT LEAST ONE FORMER NLD MEMBER, WERE ARRESTED IN RANGOON ON SEPTEMBER 25. IT IS NOT CLEAR YET WHAT CHARGES HAVE BEEN BROUGHT AGAINST THE THIRTY. THERE ARE HINTS, HOWEVER, THAT THESE ARRESTS MAY BE PART OF A MORE GENERAL SWEEP FOR ACTIVISTS IN RANGOON. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) THE STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (SPDC) ARRESTED ABOUT THIRTY BURMESE ACTIVISTS IN RANGOON ON SEPTEMBER 25. RELIABLE SOURCES HAVE CORROBORATED THE ARRESTS AND REPORTED THAT MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CONFISCATED SOME PUBLICATIONS FROM THE RESIDENCES OF THOSE WHO WERE ARRESTED. INCLUDED AMONG THE PEOPLE ARRESTED WERE SEVEN RELATIVELY WELL-KNOWN POLITICAL ACTIVISTS: ZAW PHAY WIN, YE KYAW SWA, HLA HTUT SOE, U MYINT, YIN MAUNG, NE WIN AND LWIN KO MAUNG. ZAW PHAY WIN HAS BEEN ARRESTED SEVERAL TIMES SINCE 1988 AND WAS OPERATING A WELL-KNOWN PRIVATE TUTORING SERVICE IN DOWNTOWN RANGOON. FIVE OF ZAW PHAY WIN'S COLLEAGUES FROM THE TUTORING SERVICE WERE ALSO AMONG THOSE ARRESTED. YE KYAW SWA AND HLA HTUT SOE ARE OLD STUDENT ACTIVISTS WHO WERE JAILED FROM 1989-94, AND THEN AGAIN IN 1996. SOME OF THE ARRESTED ACTIVISTS WERE REPORTED TO BE CONNECTED TO THE UNION OF BURMA DEMOCRATIC FRONT (UBDF), A DEFUNCT POLITICAL PARTY ASSOCIATED WITH MOE THEZUN, WHO WAS THE CHAIRMAN OF DEMOCRATIC PARTY FOR NEW SOCIETY (DPNS). U MYINT WAS A FORMER NLD MEMBER.

3. (SBU) THESE ARRESTS MAY BE PART OF A CONTINUING SWEEP FOR ACTIVISTS IN RANGOON. THERE WERE ALSO REPORTS IN RANGOON ON SEPTEMBER 29 THAT SEVERAL MONKS HAD BEEN ARRESTED. IN ADDITION, SINCE EARLY SEPTEMBER, THE AUTHORITIES HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEFED UP NIGHTTIME, HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CHECKS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE UNREGISTERED OVERNIGHT GUESTS. IN BURMA, FAILING TO REGISTER SUCH GUESTS IS ITSELF A CRIME.

MARTINEZ